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ABSTRACT

The administration at Normandale Community College in Bloomington, Minnesota, has had tremendous influence on the college's forensics program. The first positive administrative decision made was to involve every full-time person hired in speech and theatre in the activity part of the program. Another positive aspect of the administration is its relatively constant and consistent moral and financial support. On the negative side is (1) the loss of a protected "activity fee" that was identified separately from tuition and allocated through a process which involved students, faculty, and administrators; and (2) the "split" personality that faculty develop as they teach "under" one associate dean and engage in speech and theatre activities "under" another associate dean. Not only does this mean that there is not one administrator who has responsibility to understand all of the speech program, but it also carries with it the preparation of two separate budgets and the artificial separation into two parts of what ought to be one whole. Suggestions for improving a speech activity program would include making the speech activity program a cocurricular program by involving the whole community and learning how to do more with less by bringing forensic tournaments closer to home. Faculty and administrators must devote the best of their efforts to "save" the community colleges for a complete communication program--both curricular and cocurricular. (HOD)

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Community College Administrator Involvement with Forensics Programs

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"Community College Administrator Involvement with Forensics Programs"
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Prepared for presentation at the SCA convention, Anaheim, California
on November 13, 1981.

I have spent the last nine years in community college education. During seven of those years I have been a speech coach and director of speech activities at Normandale. For last academic year and this I have served as an associate dean of instruction. Last year that position included the responsiblity for the academic side of the speech and theatre program (among others). This year I am responsible for (again among other things) the community service and continuing education mission of the college. All of these experiences prepare me, I hope, to say something about the relationships between college administration and the college forensics' program.

I will try to use the Normandale experience to illustrate my remarks, because it is the setting with which I am most familiar. I hope that you will adapt it to your own situation. Because I will use the NCC experience I want to begin with a brief history of speech activities at Normandale, especially with an eye toward noting the good and bad decisions which I think we have made administratively which have affected forensics. I will follow that with the problems forensics has created for administration--according to the views as I have heard them presented by deans and associate deans of students and instruction. Finally I will try to make some suggestions as to how we can make the speech activity program more attractive to administrators.

When I came to Normandale in the fall of 1973 forensics was already well established as a student activity. The college had been founded in 1968. The forensics' program followed in the fall

of 1970. Initially it had involvement by two speech faculty members, Linda Putman and Gary Dostal. At this point I want to acknowledge a positive administrative decision which was made early on. The college president believed that every full-time person hired in speech/theatre should be involved in the activity part of the program. This meant that we always had several people taking turns as directors, and we always have had at least two persons serving as speech coaches. In fact, in recent years, we have had as many as four coaches, and even though speech and theatre are now separated have until this year had one instructor with activity assignments in both areas.

The decision to involve everyone in the activity program is certainly in line with the recommendations of both Denver conferences. It also jibes well with common sense. We all know of the difficulty of getting students ready to deal with the "reality" of judging. I have always been able to tell Normandale students that they must work with more than one of our coaches on a given speech or selection. I have also been able to tell them that the coaches may well not agree--and that is all to the good. It is of course also true that when the student goes from coach to coach trying to find someone who will second her belief that here is a really good speech, she often finds that there can be agreement among critics after all.

Another positive thing which the Normandale administration has provided to the speech activity program is relatively constant and consistent moral and financial support. Though our budget has in real terms, measured against inflation, dropped in the last few years (and I will get into some of the reasons for that) there was not been

dramatic shifts--up or down. Even though we have had budget crises in past years, and are in the middle of one now, there has been sufficient support from the president and dean of students to keep the cuts in activity spending at no higher level than that of the balance of the college. At one of our sister metro area community colleges during a budget crunch last year the decision was made to cut the program back so substantially that the director simply decided to drop it. Agree with his decision or no (and I doubt if I would have made it in that way) you can agree with his frustration, and we lost a fine program which is now trying to begin again from scratch.

Lest I paint too rosy a picture of speech activity life in southwest suburban Twin Cities, let me present the other side of the coin. We have made at least two mistakes administratively in past years in dealing with speech activities, although they are actually mistakes in dealing with all activities, and speech is just one of the areas affected.

The first was a decision forced on us by our board office in St. Paul. Our mistake was in not fighting it more than we did as speech people and as administrators. I should indicate that we are a state college, one part of a state system, and hence are subject to decisions made at a higher level. The decision to which I refer was the decision to abandon a protected "activity fee" which was identified separately from tuition, retained on the local campus, and allocated through a process which involved students, faculty and administrators. What we got in its place was a higher tuition fee which is part of the college income and is allocated, as is all college income from whatever source, through the normal budget process. While it was

asserted at the time that this would not have a negative impact on funds available for activities; that was absurd on the face of it, AND has not proved to be true. When the money is not protected the risk is much larger that it will be "claimed" by other parts of the college who have, or feel they have, a more pressing need.

A second problem which I see in our organization relating to activities is in organization. I refer to the "split" personality which all activity people develop, as they work for two administrators as their first-line supervisors. For the part of the faculty member's time which is related to speech instruction, her supervisor is the associate dean of instruction. In the speech activity part of her life she reports to the associate dean of students. Not only does this mean that there is not one administrator who has the responsibility to understand all of the speech program, but it also carries with it the preparation of two separate budgets and the artificial separation in two parts of what ought to be one whole. It also tends to spawn paperwork, and none of us needs more of that. Most important of the problems it causes, however, is a competition between student services and instruction for the faculty member's time. That, however, leads to my next consideration.

I've mentioned problems caused by administrators for speech activity people. There is no doubt that we cause a few in the other direction as well. First let's consider the associate dean and/or the dean of instruction. Most of them would like to be able to schedule speech people five days a week, and at any time during the day. Not an unreasonable request BUT, as we all know, anyone who

travels with the speech team is going to miss so many Friday classes, or night classes, or whatever, as to make his schedule significanly less flexible than most. Also there is often a perception on the part of instructional administrators that people with activity assignments direct all of their time and energy to the activity program, and give their classes a short shrift. I don't believe that this is true, at least not around my shop, but the perception remains.

What of the associate dean and dean of students? The problem here is that our activity is in some ways rather unique. Unless the DS or ADS is a former speech person, it is really hard to explain our needs. Often his background is in some other part of the student service area. His model of the intercollegiate activity program is usually that of athletics. While there are probably some ways in which speech and athletics are comparable, there are more in which they are not. It is hard to explain that we do not know a year in advance which tournaments will be offered on which weekend, and how many people will be on the "team". One can generate such figures based on past averages, of course, but they will never be exact. It is also often hard to explain the nature of the many different types of speech/oral interp/theatre related activities which make up the total forensics program. They often also do not understand the tension between the competitive/noncompetitive dimensions of our programs, especially on the community college level. While they want to know who "wins" and who "looses" they may be disconcerted with the answers, "Some, one, eveyone and no one"--even thought they may be the right answers.

I have been detailing problems, but do I have any solutions? Clearly I have ideas about the best ways to solve some of the problems which I have been detailing which are perhaps peculiar to Normandale (although I doubt that many of them are). What I'd like to end with, however, are some thoughts which I'd like to try to make wearing my administrator's hat. These will be in the form of suggestions for improving speech activity programs in ways which should result in better administrative understanding of and support for your own program.

The first suggestion I would make was stressed by Denver I and reiterated by Denver II. Make your speech activity program truly a co-curricular, and not just an extra-curricular program. Don't even use the second term. Relate it to what you are about educationally, and let your administrators see that relationship. We are community colleges. Go into the community and bring the community to you. Set up speaker's bureaus. Take your reader's theate to the senior citizen's center. Be constant in your availability to present forensics' material at Rotary, Lions, et. al. Consider using students who wouldn't even consider competitive forensics to work with "help" programs in the community; relate them to courses in interpersonal, nonverbal, family communication, intercultural, whatever you may offer in your college. Believe yourself and make it clear to your administration that this is a program which presents the college in a positive light and which flows naturally from everthing you are about in the academic side of your work.

Involve everyone in the college you can convince, cajole, or coerce. This may cause you to rethink what the speech program means.

If it means to you taking the same 14 20 year olds to 15 tournaments to win 16 national trophies, I don't think you're going to survive the 80's--at least not most places. Encourage the "non-traditional" student to get involved. All of us have student bodies which are getting older. One of the joys of speech (as opposed perhaps to football) is that the 35 year old mother of two can participate, or the 50 year old man changing careers. She or he may not want to be on the road every weekend, but they may want one or two experiences, perhaps close to home. And they may well get hooked and win you one of those national trophies after all. By all means let us try to respond to the changing needs of our student populations. We can!

Involve our students, faculty and administrators in what we are about. Let them know about local tournaments. Publicize! If necessary invoke any necessary hoopla to compel them to come in. Our programs will be the healthier if everyone in our college communities know what speech activities are, how they work, and how much fun they can be. We usually don't distrust what we know.

Finally, and this is sad but nonetheless true, learn how to do more with less. Even those of us who have been fairly lucky so far can see the trends. States and local communities are being affected by decisions in Washington and in state capitals. I have no doubt that we are going to see funding cuts for education from all levels, except perhaps tuition. This will cause every school to take some hard looks and make some tough decisions. If we can't afford to continue to do everything we have been doing, what shall we not do? I firmly believe that we can be sure the speech activities continue. To do so, however, we are going to have to demonstrate

that there is a need for what we do, that we do it well with all due academic rigor, and that we can do it for a price that the college and the student can afford to pay. My first college forensics' job was with a university which regularly "justified" sending 4 students and a coach to tournaments thousands of miles away from its campus in search of a national debate title. I would have had trouble as an administrator buying that 15 years ago. I would find it absolutely impossible now. We are probably going to find that tournaments closer to home together with new community experiences are going to be of increasing importance. I hope we can keep our once-a-year national competition. I think it serves a vital need. It shows us that people do not operate in just the same way all over the country--if nothing more, and I believe it does much more. But I am afraid that to keep it most of us are going to have to make more and more sacrifices in our regular seasons.

Obviously I believe in the value of speech activities to the community college. I'm sure all of us here do. But while it is fun once in a while to preach to the converted, let me suggest that all of us, faculty and administrators, devote the best of our efforts to "saving" our own community colleges for a <u>complete</u> communication program--both curricular and co-curricular.